

RECKLESS RALPH'S

DIME NOVEL ROUND-UP

A monthly magazine devoted to the collecting, preservation and literature of the old-time dime and nickel novels, libraries and popular story papers.

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WAS THAT JESSE JAMES?

Joe Gantner

"Old Mandy always was 'teched in the head."

"Land sakes alive, Sadie! Remember how we used to look for that 'buried money' that Old Mandy said was buried in the Dollinger pasture over there?"

"He! he! Everytime we went for water down in the hollow over there we looked under those rocks by that spring under the old walnut tree, thinking we would find that buried money." Aunt Sadie said.

"Old Mandy always claimed she saw two men bury a kettle of something under the old walnut tree, even after she went to the crazy asylum." Aunt Polly replied.

I overheard these old negro women make the above remarks, as I was walking home one hot summer day at the noon-time.

I knew these old colored women well, as Aunt Sadie Craxon's home was the only negro home in our neighborhood, and Aunt Polly whose home was a block away was visiting her, and were sitting out upon the front porch.

Being interested, I stopped, and said to them;

"What is that I hear you say about buried money?"

"Mister Joe." Aunt Polly, who was fat and loquacious said;

"Remember Old Mandy Cooper, who lived over there on that high hill—in that little log cabin? Well you know she lived there a long time even before the civil war. Not long after the war, Old Mandy said she saw two men come up the hollow,

and coming to that walnut tree that was in the Dollinger pasture, and near that spring where we colored folks used to get all our drinking water, they started to dig. She noticed them take a kettle out of a sack, and then one of the men said something to the other, and pulled out the largest pistol, Aunt Mandy had ever seen, and then started up the hill towards Mandy. Old Aunt Mandy said she sure was scared, and she crawled on her hands and knees through some shoemaker bushes until she reached another hollow, and then she ran away from that place as fast as she could. She believed those White Men would have surely killed her if they had seen her."

"If I remember right Old Aunt Mandy died in the crazy asylum." I answered.

"Yes! that is why we colored folks never believed her much, she used to say some of the craziest things." Aunt Polly replied.

"I still can remember that old walnut tree, and the spring where you colored folks used to get water. Is that the place right over that hill there?" I asked.

"Yes-suh! that the place, Mr. Joe."

"Well Aunt Sadie, and Polly, I am going to show you colored folks how to find buried treasure." I said good naturedly, as I was leaving.

"Good luck Mr. Joe." Aunt Polly said laughing loudly, "we don't believe there is any there, as we believe Old Mandy was as crazy as a loon. She must have seen a cow coming towards her, and thought it was a man."

I walked home slowly. I could see the Old Dollinger Home in the distance. It was a large white Colonial

house that had no windows on the West side. in the rear of this old house was about fifteen acres of pasture land. I had played many a time as a boy in this old pasture, and it had blended into my life so, that even at this late day it always had a romantic urge, that brought forth the most mystifying feeling, as I often wandered alone in this pasture. A branch of water cut across an angle of this pasture, running through a deep hollow. Many gulleys also lead into this hollow. The land on both sides slanted towards the branch.

On the southwest corner of this large pasture our four acre estate stood. Our land was on a high hill, overlooking the branch, and was full of woods, growing wild, in most places. We named our place WILD-WOOD. I was born and raised on this old homestead, and I had such an intense love and fondness for my wildwood home, that I positively would not sell it at any price. Near the Dollinger pasture was an old swing tree, where as a boy I had spent my most delightful hours, reading I must say such 'Blood and thunder literature as, Nick Carter, Diamond Dick, Buffalo Bill, and all about those notorious Missouri bandits, the James Boys. It was a joyous imaginative life I lived in those happy boyhood days. I will never forget how the Old Dollinger Home and pasture interested me and filled me with wonder as I see this old home in the distance. I felt that this lonely looking home must once have been filled with youth and laughter, and I could almost feel that again I heard the strains of music, as the Southern Belles and Beaus danced the waltz.

As long as I can remember there has been in my life a strong desire to find buried treasures. Why this desire was constantly in my mind I could not tell. I know that whenever lost treasure conversations would come up, and I expressed a belief in the possibility of finding them, my friends always laughed at me, and even suggested that I was out of my head. I made a deep research of 'Lost Treasures. My room was filled with books, and topographical maps of Alaska, California, and Texas. I did most of my prospecting in my own room.

You can imagine with my state of mind, of what interest the disclosure

of these colored women was to me. Most people would have turned these disclosures off as the wanderings of crazy women, but to me it had only inflamed my imagination, to search for this buried money at the first opportunity I could find. Here I was searching all over creation for buried treasure, and maybe it was near me all the time. I decided I would find out all I could about the Old Dollinger Place, and made many inquiries about it.

Here's what I found out that aroused my interest greatly. A Captain Reneau, an officer in the Confederate Army had once owned the Old Dollinger Place. Some said he was an uncle, others said he was a cousin of those famous and notorious bandits; FRANK and JESSE JAMES, the Missouri Outlaws, who fearlessly rode from the Civil War to about 1882, robbing banks and trains, and raising Hail Columbia generally. Some claim the James boys were the Robin Hoods of America, robbing the rich, and giving to the poor. Anyhow a great romantic literature has been built around the name of the James Boys of Old Missouri. History says that JESSE JAMES was killed by his cousin Bob Ford, in St. Joseph, Mo., in 1882, and that his brother FRANK JAMES, gave himself up to Gov. Crittenden a few months later. I understand Capt. Reneau did all he could to get a pardon for Frank James, and that Frank James stayed at his house the night before he went to Jefferson City to give himself up. For divine reasons I do not care to tell the name of the town where all this happened, but I will say that my home town is somewhere in Central Missouri near the town of Otterville, where the notorious JAMES BROS. had perpetrated one of their most sensational train robberies. Some very old men told me that they had lived near the Capt. Reneau Home, and had seen JESSE and FRANK JAMES many times tie their horses to the hitching post in front of the Reneau Home, and go in and spend the night there. I don't know how these worthy friends of mine could tell how these men were the James boys or not, but I guess the identity of these strangers leaked out through some small member of the Reneau Family.

After hearing all this, I wondered if the two men Old Aunt Mandy had

seen could have possibly been the James Bros.? Could they, after robbing the train at Otterville, Mo., have ridden twenty-five miles north, and buried their loot upon their uncles place. There seemed to be a possibility that such a thing could have happened, and I decided I would search in the pasture below my house as soon as possible.

So one fine Indian Summer afternoon, when Nature was in all its beauty, and the red and yellow colors predominated the landscape, I took my spade down in the hollow, intending to search for that lost treasure. I went along the branch to the place where I remembered the old walnut tree and the spring had been. There were not a trace anymore of the old walnut tree or the spring. At least thirty-five years had elapsed since I had remembered those negro women getting water out of the spring, and since my brothers and I had gathered walnuts under the tree. I spent considerable time that afternoon looking for treasure signs, tapping every rock, and digging a little here and there. Have you ever tried to look for mysterious signs in bare pasture land? If you have, you will know what I was up against. There was not even a rock or stump to show that there ever was any treasure buried there. After spending nearly the whole afternoon punching into every crack or crevice I could find, I decided, like the old negro women, that Old Aunt Mandy was indeed 'teched in the head.' I could not get it into my head that treasure was buried so near to my home.

Several years now passed. In my day-dreams I still imagined that some day I would go to some state like Texas, and spend some time looking up those wonderful treasure stories in Dobie's Book called *Coronado's Children*. The great depression finally overtook our land, and more and more I lived alone and dreamt of the time when I should become suddenly rich by finding lost treasure, or to go again looking for placer gold. I was now in my middle age, and in the best of health and spirits, and I don't mean the alcohol kind either.

To go on with my story. One afternoon a few years ago, when my business being very dull, and the day very beautiful, as it was late spring, I decided to spend the afternoon home

working in my garden. How grand and beautiful Nature in all its May splendor looked, as I stood leaning on my hoe noticing everything, with my short-sighted eyes, as I did not have my glasses on. I was alone, loving the solitude, being one person at least who can enjoy his own company, without always having a crowd around, as most people do. It was near two o'clock, and I stood looking all-a-round. On the West side was my home, surrounded by a wildwood of trees, and the birds in droves made it resound, like heavenly music. I was proud of my home standing so lonely among its trees. On the South, and near my fence was at least ten acres of corn, of which the wind blew through so gently, and soothingly. Southeast of me I could see the strong substantial red brick building of the County Home, where the aged and poor were sent. It was at least a half-a-mile away. The branch ran near this place, and the land on the South and Southeast was farming and pasture land. On the Northeast, about a quarter of a mile way was an addition of houses, and directly North was the Old Dollinger Place, (or Reneau Home). The main body of the town was on the Northwest. All of this location I am describing was still within the city limits. There was a natural hedge fence between me and the Old Dollinger pasture, and a cow was peacefully nibbling the grass in this old pasture. I felt delighted that no houses had been built upon this pasture land, and that it still was as clear of population as when I was a boy.

As I leaned on my hoe, looking through the hedge fence, I suddenly noticed an old man walking along the branch, about two hundred yards from where I was standing. I could see he had boots on, and a khaki colored suit, like a hunting jacket. He had a wide brimmed hat, western style, and pulled low over his eyes. I could see all this in outline more than detail as my glasses were in the house. Something about his actions attracted my attention. I wondered if he was an inmate of the County Home, as many a time I have seen those poor people follow that Branch home as a short cut from town. He had a long sack over his back, and in his hand he had a map, or a paper of some kind.

He walked very slowly long the branch examining the topography of the landscape. He would stop, look at his paper then look closely all around. I stood there wondering what he was going to do next, but thought that probably he intended to buy the old Dollinger Place. I hoped he would not as I did not want it to change hands. From my place to the branch was a deep gully. It had trees all along it, and my fence divided it from Dollinger's Pasture. When he came to the head of this gully, he seemed to become very enthusiastic. He would look up this gully, and then his map. He walked all around examining the entrance to the gully from all sides. He held his hand to his eyes, as if he were trying to see something up the gully. He looked around for a good place to cross the branch. To me his actions looked very suspicious. I wondered if he was some moron, and in that sack was the dead body of some child he intended to bury. I wanted to see what he was going to do, so I walked along the hedge for about 100 feet, and laid hid in the grass and hedge just above where the gully entered my place. I laid as close to the ground as I could and looked through the hedge at the approaching old man. He came up the gully towards me examining every foot. Nothing seemed to escape his keen eyes. He almost arrived at our border fence when he stopped still, looking closely at a rock that projected slightly from the bank of the gully opposite me. This rock was about two feet long and was laid like a strata, and was about a half a foot thick. As a boy I had many times intended to carve my name on it, but I never got around to it. It was imbedded in the soil so strong that no one could budge it. Our stranger was so interested that he seemed a younger man now, and he jumped with great agility over to the rock, and after feeling on it and pushing his strength against it, he pulled out his map and started to study it more. Then going on top of the hill he kicked around in the grass, and examined a walnut tree that was only about ten years old. As he stood pushing that small tree, I happened to remember as a very small boy that on that very spot, I had played on the stump of a very large walnut tree; and this small walnut tree must

be an offspring of that old tree.

The stranger finally seemed satisfied, and then he came back to his rock. This rock was in the sloping bank of the gully, about three feet from the floor of the gully. The stranger went to his sack, and untied it and took from it a spade. I wondered if I was about to witness a murderer burying his victim. The sack did look rather round, and heavy for this very old man to carry. I was now only about 30 feet away, and this man impressed me of being nearly 90 years old.

The stranger walked as erectly, almost as a younger man. His hair was still thick, and I imagined his eyes were grey, though I could prove nothing, as I did not have my glasses on. He must have been a very handsome man in his younger days. He had about him almost a military appearance I might say. The stranger was now prodding in the earth with his spade, then he finally began to dig. He worked feverously at this for a while, then he mopped his brow, turned and looked all around as if he was afraid someone was observing him. He pulled out of the side pocket of his coat, one of the largest revolvers I had ever seen, and examined it closely, then laid it on the rock handy to reach, as he was digging at an angle of forty-five degrees directly under the rock.

He was making good progress digging, and he must have had a hole about two feet deep, when just South of me in the corn patch a dog barked. He instantly became alert and listened, then quickly grabbing his gun, and putting it in his pocket, came up the gully hill directly towards me. I thought my time had come, and I wondered if the hedge and grass were long enough to conceal me. I laid with my head pressed close to the earth not daring to move. The vibration of his footsteps sounding loudly in my ears. My only protection if it came to the worse was the hoe lying near me. I hoped and prayed he would pass me by without seeing me, and felt that he was the kind of a man that if he had seen me lying there, he would have plugged me without the least hesitation. He was just about five feet from me when he stopped, and my heart leaped into my mouth, as I thought that he probably was aiming that large revolver

at me, but he moved on following my hedge to the top of the hill.

He must have been gone at least five minutes, and I had moved around a little to make things more comfortable and safe, and with my ears to the ground I again heard the vibration of his foot-steps approaching along the hedge. I wondered if he had seen my freshly dug earth, where I had been hoeing. I was glad that I had sense enough to bring my hoe with me, and not to have left it lying on the ground for him to notice. His footsteps sounded loud and angry to me. I could hear him mumbling to himself as he approached me, and as he passed opposite to me I heard him make some kind of a remark of "why people don't let him alone?"

He went down to his stone, then going up the other hill he looked all around. He even leaned on my fence and looked into my woods, which was very thick at that place. Seeming to be satisfied he again went to his rock, and began digging, putting as much energy and vim in it as a dog does when he digs for a rabbit. He worked steadily, for nearly an hour, and when the hole was about four feet deep, he cautiously touched something with his spade, then he furiously began digging at more of an angle. I lay there feeling stiff and sore, and I thought to myself; 'what in the dickens could he be digging?' I hoped he would get through soon, as I was getting very tired lying on the ground.

Soon he reached into the hole, and with an exclamation of satisfaction he pulled out something dry looking, and looked as though it was about to fall to pieces. It had the shape of once being a leather mail bag. I have seen them many a time around railway stations. He quickly pulled the top open, then reaching in he pulled out something that looked that at one time it might have been a kettle.

He quickly pried off the top of the kettle, and seemed disappointed, as he reached his hand in the kettle, and brought forth some white powdery stuff. He reached in again and happily brought forth some coins. I could not tell if they were gold or silver. He shook the kettle, and it sounded to me as if it were full of coins. Then he went to his sack, and taking out a newspaper and a large blanket, he spread it on the ground, then he dumped the contents of the small

kettle on it. I noticed that he had quite a pile of coins covered with a powdery substance of which I thought must have been paper money which had not kept.

Seeing this man find this buried treasure so near my home made me mad. Here I had mentally looked all over this U. S. for buried treasure, and this stranger comes and takes it nearly off of my place. I believe if he had found it on my place, I would have gone down there and claimed it even if he did have a revolver as big as a small cannon. I saw now where Old Aunt Mandy had made her mistake. She thought she had seen the two men north of this gulley where the branch made a turn, bury that kettle. She must have been misled by the same size of walnut tree being in the location on the side of both gulleys. Her twisted brain must have been fooled on the topography. There was a gulley in the corn field south of my place, to which she must have run and hid. What a fool I have been not to have thought of this. I felt irritated as I saw him play with those coins. Suddenly he made a remark, that surprised me as much as if a case of dynamite had exploded in my face. He said "I wish Frank was here, now!"

Was that JESSE JAMES? Never in my life did I miss my glasses as at that moment. Here before my very eyes was the greatest drama of history being pulled off, and I was unfortunate enough to be near-sighted. Could this be the world-famous bandit, that the foreign countries knew the name better than even our Presidents? Could this be the man that was supposed to have been shot in St. Joseph, Missouri, and even today, relic hunters were chipping slivers of rocks off his tombstone, to show and brag to their friends, that the slivers came off of the grave of JESSE JAMES. Here before me calmly counting his money, was a man supposed to have been dead 50 years. Even the most imaginative authors of the 'Blood and Thunder Literature' had not imagined that. I wondered as I laid on that ground, if all the heroes and characters of my boy-hood days were again to pass by me. Nick Carter, Buffalo Bill, Diamond Dick, etc. What a galaxy of them. Yes Sir! was this man JESSE JAMES, or was I seeing a ghost?

The stranger who I sincerely believed to be JESSE JAMES got up rather sadly, as if he realized for the first time, that his elder brother FRANK JAMES was dead. That he had died around the World War Times, and that there was no need to make idle wishes. He put all the coins into the kettle, then into the sack, and was very careful to destroy all evidence that he had been there. I lay there wondering should I tell the law. I knew it would take some time for me to dress and go up town, as I was in my overalls, and had no telephone in the house. I decided if this was JESSE JAMES, the police should know about it.

After carefully filling up the hole and covering it over with sod. He picked up his sack, and throwing it over his shoulder, walked down the gully, and turned south at the branch, and went in the direction of the County Home. I saw him climb over a wire fence, and disappear behind a hill.

As quickly as I could I went up to my house, and dressed, and went to town, a mile away. I saw the Chief of Police standing on the corner, and knowing him well I told what I had seen to him. He was skeptical about the whole matter, and made sport of it. He said:

"Joe you read too much about lost treasures, you are seeing things."

"All the same" I replied, "I am telling the truth."

"I may go out there after a while and, try to find your Jesse James" he said.

"It is men like you that keeps the world from growing wiser," I said sarcastically as I was moving away. "Maybe if you hurry you can still get that reward of \$50,000 for JESSE JAMES, DEAD OR ALIVE."

I went back home disgusted, and searched up the hollow myself but could not find anything.

Yes, "Old Mandy always was 'Tech-ed in the head.' She remembered accidents all right, but she could not remember locations. A peculiar thing happened to me. My desire to hunt for buried treasures completely left me. I wonder if that inanimate object (that kettle of coin) had been vibrating that desire to me all these years. Nothing would surprise me after what the radio does with vibrations.

Only recently I picked up a Western Magazine, and there was a story

in it, about a man claiming to be JESSE JAMES. He claims no one ever knew what JESSE JAMES really looked like, and that another bandit parading as JESSE JAMES was killed in ST JOSEPH, MO. by his own cousin BOB FORD. I could not say if the man I saw in that hollow, looked like this man or not. Remember I am very near-sighted.

Was that JESSE JAMES? If it was I don't want him to go a gunning for me, for it would be as old fashioned for be to be 'knocked off' by JESSE JAMES, as it would be to be run over by a horse and buggy, in this modern new fangled age of the automobile.

(Note: This story is purely fictional.)

James Madison, or rather Charles Aronstein, Happy Hours Brotherhood Member No. 61, died March the 27th, 1943, very suddenly. A fine man was he and to all that knew him.

He was the publisher of several fine magazines, such as "Collecting for Profit," "The Collectors Journal," "The Collectors Guide," besides other collectors' magazines, and his last magazine "The Rare Book Speculator," a quarterly, tabloid size, for the duration of the war.

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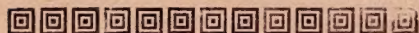
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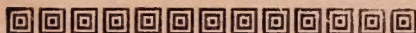
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